

ALFRED HITCHCOCK'S mystery magazine

CONTENTS

BABYSITTER by Dion Henderson	2
WHERE IS THY STING? by James Holding	18
THE QUIET EYE by Steve O'Connell	26
THELMA SMALLEY VS. CRIME by Glenn Andrews	38
A WOMAN'S WORK IS NEVER DONE by Helen Fislar Brooks	52
GOODBYE MEMORY by Jack Ritchie	62
DIG WE MUST by Jeff Heller	76
GUARANTEED REST IN PEACE by Bryce Walton	84
ANOTHER DAY, ANOTHER MURDER by Lawrence Treat	96
THE WAITING GAME by Pat Stadley	110
THE EGG HEAD by Rog Phillips	116

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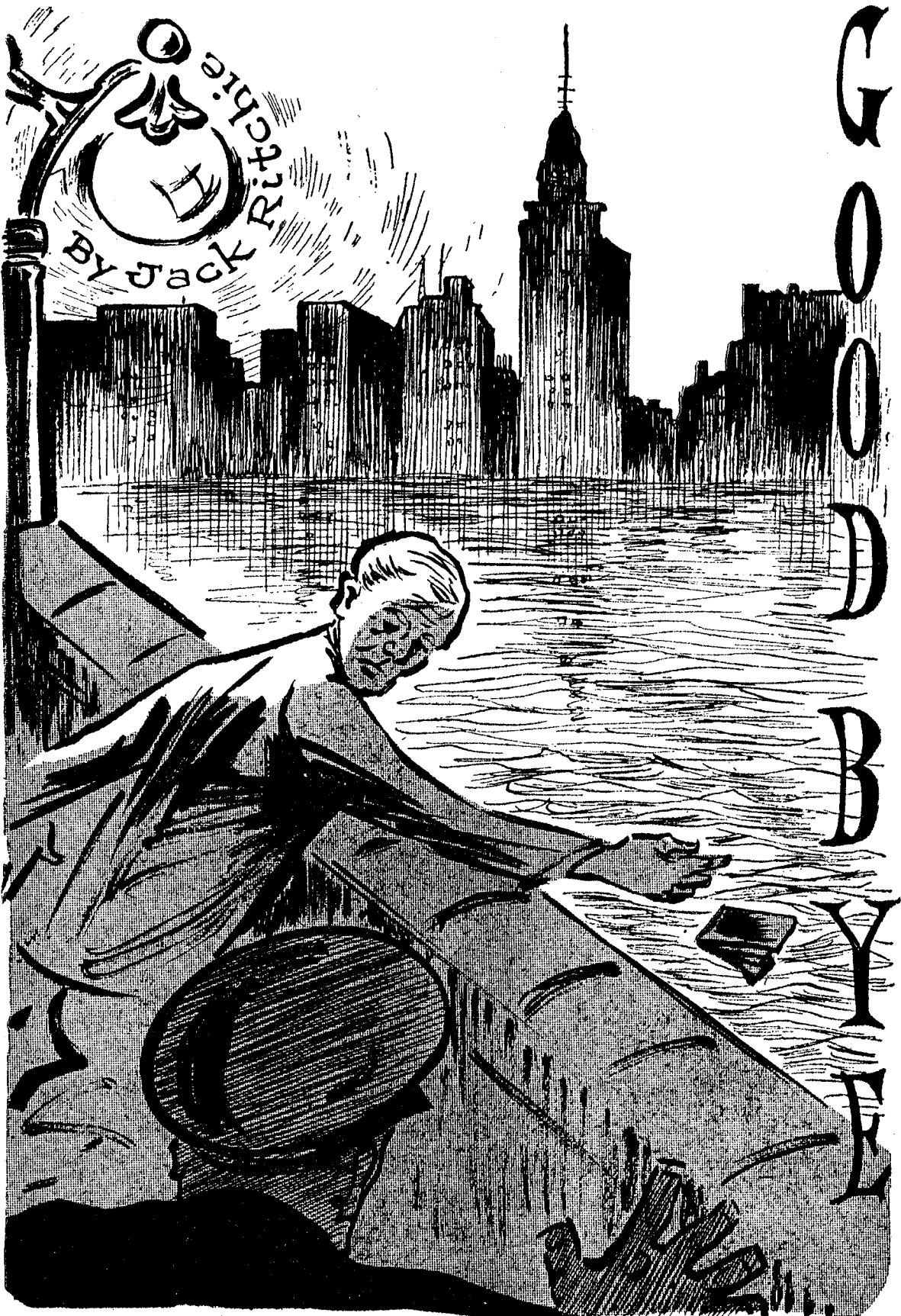
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Memory, we all know, is a sometime thing. When the moon is right, for example, a man may remember what he ate for breakfast on Whitsunday forty years ago, and yet not remember the color of his wife's eyes. Total recall may be exercised, or total oblivion, according to the individual . . .

IHAVE total amnesia," I said.

"If you had total amnesia, you would not remember how to talk or walk."

"Very well," I said. "I have qualified amnesia."

For a psychiatrist, he was remarkably restless. Dr. Brenner paced back and forth. "Look. Don't you *want* to find out who you are?"

"No."

He still regarded that attitude as distressing. "But *everybody* wants to know who he is."

"Not those of us with true amnesia."

He pointed a rather angry finger. "It's my personal opinion that in cases of amnesia, nine out of ten of the supposed victims are simply liars."

"You're losing your temper again."

He glowered at his cigarette.

"This morning at two o'clock, a police officer found you on the Lincoln Avenue Bridge looking dazed and staring at the water. What were you doing there?"

"I suspect that I had been about to jump off."

"Why?"

"I don't know and I don't want to find out. Evidently, I had the choice of jumping off that bridge or losing my memory. I preferred to lose my memory."

Brenner took a deep breath. "And when the officer asked you your name, you said you didn't know."

I conceded that.

"He then asked to see your wallet. What did you do?"

"I took it out of my pocket and tossed it into the river."

"Why?"

"Obviously I did not want to find out who I was."



My oldest memory was that of standing on a bridge, staring down at the murky greenish water and wondering uneasily why I was there. But I had a strong suspicion.

I did not consciously realize that I did not know who I was until the very moment the policeman asked me my name. And tossing away the wallet had been an instinctive spontaneous action. It was not until later—after my physical examination and the elimination of the possibility of physical injury—that I actually arrived at my present viewpoint. When a man loses his memory because of some emotional shock, he has, in essence, volunteered. He was not drafted.

"Perhaps you have a family? Children?"

"No children," I said. I wondered how I was so certain of that.

"Some day you'll regain your memory."

"Not if I resist." I tried to be patient with him. "We admit that there are two types of true amnesia—the one induced by physical injury and the other as the result of an emotional shock. You have examined my skull and discovered that it is uniformly convex. I did not strike my head. Therefore I suffer from an amnesia caused by unbearable emotional stress."

"You've got to face whatever it

was which caused the amnesia."

"Why?"

He waved a hand. "Well . . . it's the mature thing to do."

"Inflicting pain upon one's self is masochism, not maturity. If I remember and face my problem, what guarantee is there that I will not promptly return to the bridge and complete my original mission?"

He rubbed the back of his neck. "All right. Then what *do* you intend to do?"

"As soon as you release me—and I demand that immediately—I intend to leave this vicinity behind. Preferably by a thousand miles. I want no contact with anyone who might restore my memory."

"How do you think you can travel? You have no money."

That was a painful point and I would have to give it some thought.

The phone on his desk rang and he picked it up. After a moment of listening, he smiled. "Darwin? Send him right in."

"Who is that?" I asked suspiciously.

Brenner's smile achieved smugness. "You'll find out."

The man who entered was in his fifties and wore a Spaniel concern on his face. "Oswald! So it *is* you. I *thought* I recognized the

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description the police gave me."

Oswald? What a revolting name. I could not resist asking, "Is that my first or last name?"

"Your first. Your last is—"

"Never mind," I said quickly. "I don't want to know."

"We found a scrap of paper with Mr. Darwin's address in your top-coat pocket," Dr. Brenner said. "We informed him of your situation and asked him to come over. We thought he might perhaps be able to identify you."

"This is Oswald Harrison," Darwin said. "I'm his lawyer and investment counselor."

Investment counselor? I determined to try one delicate probe into the past. "Do I have money?"

"Of course, Oswald. You're worth over a million."

"I really *do* have that much? I mean I haven't been embezzled or robbed recently? Very recently?"

"Of course not, Oswald."

I decided to probe no further.

"I'll take him home," Darwin said. "I'll see that he has the best of care, the best of doctors."

"I don't want to go home and I don't want the best of doctors," I said firmly. "I simply want to cash a check and leave this city. I'll let you know where to send any future dividends or the like in the future."

Darwin cleared his throat. "Os-

wald, are you *really* suffering from amnesia?"

"Of course. Do you have a blank check I can use? I think five thousand dollars should suffice me for the present."

Darwin looked uncomfortable. "I have your power of attorney. I'm afraid that I'd have to stop payment on any check you might choose to write now, Oswald."

I glared at him. "Why?"

"I'd only be doing it to protect you from yourself, Oswald. If you actually *have* amnesia, then for legal purposes you're—ah—mentally incompetent."

I'm afraid I raised my voice considerably. "Mentally incompetent? Darwin, you're fired."

"Now, now," he said soothingly. "In your present condition you can't fire me either."

I looked at Dr. Brenner. He seemed to be enjoying this.

"I don't know the exact procedure," Darwin said. "But I believe that the court will appoint me as your guardian until such time as you recover your memory or are proven mentally and emotionally responsible."

I was faced with an impossible dilemma. On the one hand, I had a protective amnesia which I cherished; on the other, I had a million dollars I couldn't touch until I regained my memory.

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Should I put a hand to my forehead and wince as though I felt a stab of pain? Should I suddenly mutter that my memory was coming back?

No, that seemed a bit too obvious. Perhaps Darwin might believe me—his face indicated a certain simpleness—but Dr. Brenner would not.

As a matter of fact, his raised eyebrows indicated that he expected me to try something of that nature and was joyously waiting to crush the attempt.

"Just how much do you remember, Oswald?" Darwin asked.

"Nothing," I said truthfully and reluctantly.

Darwin nodded solemnly. "You need rest, Oswald. After a shock like this, I recommend that you go back home and rest for a few days. I'm sure that Francis can take charge of everything and see that you're comfortable."

Who the devil was Frances? My wife? My cook? "Who is she?"

"He's your valet." Darwin regarded me thoughtfully. "I believe I'll put in that stop order at your bank as soon as I've taken you home."

If my property had been worth only fifty thousand or so, I believe I might cheerfully have chucked it all and departed. But after all, a million is a million.

Could I learn a few facts about myself—enough to convince Darwin that I had regained my memory—and yet not enough to disturb my actual amnesia? I did not want to find myself back on that bridge, but there *was* the money to consider. I sighed. "Very well, Darwin. Let's go home."

Darwin drove me along the western shore of the lake to the suburbs. Eventually, we turned into a long driveway that terminated in a circle before an imposing three-storied Colonial.

Darwin escorted me past the butler and into the large living room. Another servant was sorting some cellophane-wrapped suits which had evidently just arrived from the cleaners. His eyes flickered slightly when he saw me.

I took the obvious guess. "Good morning, Francis."

"Good morning, sir."

Darwin was pleased. "You recognized him, Oswald."

"Of course," I said matter-of-factly.

Darwin spoke to Francis. "Mr. Harrison has lost his memory. Or most of it."

I wandered about the room recognizing the paintings as original Pissarros and Morisots. Evidently, my amnesia did not extend to the recognition of art.

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a corner, undoubtedly conveying more information about me to the valet.

A single framed photograph on a corner shelf caught my eye. The woman portrayed had a firm jaw and penetrating eyes.

Good heavens, did I have a wife? And her?

I moved closer and was considerably relieved when I read the unadorned inscription, *Your Sister, Violet.*

In the fireplace I noticed what appeared to be the charred remains of several picture frames.

Darwin stopped whispering to Francis and evidently decided to test my memory. He pointed to the photograph. "Who is that?"

"My sister. I'd recognize her anywhere."

He was impressed. "And Beverly. Do you know who Beverly is?"

There are men named Beverly, but I decided to play the odds. "Of course I know who Beverly is. I've known her for years."

Darwin wasn't convinced. "She's your wife." He buttoned his coat. "Well, I'll be running along. I'll see that your affairs are kept in order until you regain your memory."

"Where is my wife?" I asked.

"I really don't know," Darwin said. "Possibly she's gone out shopping."

Francis appeared about to say something, but he checked himself.

When Darwin was gone, I explored the house further. It appeared that Beverly and I had separate bedrooms—which explained why she had not missed me and had chosen to go shopping.

I could not find a photograph of her.

Why did I have a photograph of my sister in the living room and none of my wife?

I went downstairs and made myself a drink.

At eleven, the front doorbell chimed and in a few moments my sister Violet strode into the room.

From the cut of her clothes, I had the distinct impression that she rode horses and divided the year into gymkhanas. She took off her coat, but not her hat, and that told me that she did not live in my house.

"Well, well, Oswald," she said. "Darwin tells me you've lost your memory again."

I frowned. "Again?"

She went to the sideboard and mixed herself a whiskey and soda. "Of course you don't remember now, do you? But it's ancient family history. You were twenty-one when it happened the last time."

I hesitated before asking, "Was

there any—particular—reason why it happened?"

She studied me over her glass for a moment. "You have always rather fancied your intelligence, haven't you?"

"My dear sister, when a man who is six feet tall is asked what his height is, he does not stoop and coyly lisp that he is merely five feet two."

She smiled faintly. "On your twenty-first birthday, father gave you fifty thousand dollars. He wanted to see what you could do with it in one year's time."

"Well?"

"You promptly invested all of it in the firm a classmate of yours was forming."

"It went broke?" I asked uneasily.

She laughed. "You were completely taken in. There *was* no firm. Your friend simply skipped to South America with every cent of your money."

I did not, did *not* remember the incident. But I was perspiring.

"You didn't regain your memory for six months. According to the psychiatrist whom father retained, there is one thing in this world you simply cannot bear. And that is being made a fool of. You chose to forget who you were, rather than face the fact that you had been made ridiculous."

"Nonsense," I snapped.

She put down her glass. "Where's Beverly?"

"I don't know." I cleared my throat. "How do Beverly and I get along?"

"Quite evenly. I don't believe you're ever had an argument."

Something had been vaguely bothering me. "How old is she?"

Violet smiled. "Twenty-three."

I knew Violet was waiting for the next question. "And how old am I?"

"Fifty-two."

"I see," I said dryly.

Violet retained her smile. "She married you for your money, of course, Oswald. But don't let that bother you now. You were always quite aware of that and chose to accept the situation."

"I was in love with her?"

Violet laughed. "Of course not. Beverly is merely another one of your possessions and appreciated in the same manner. You are willing to pay generously for the things you want and that is to your credit. But when you do acquire a possession, it becomes inflexibly yours. You will not part with it for anything."

I noticed a shadow at the doorway and recognized the profile. "Francis," I said sharply. "Have you nothing to do but eavesdrop?"

The shadow disappeared.

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I turned back to Violet. "When did I acquire him?"

"He's been with you the last ten years and I believe he's hated every minute of it. You browbeat him unmercifully."

"Then why doesn't he leave?"

"You do pay him rather well. Perhaps you have to. You've never been able to keep any other man for more than a year."

After Violet left, Francis approached me. He seemed frightened, yet urged forward by a pipe-stem of determination. "Is it true that you have amnesia, sir? That you can't remember anything?"

"Is that any business of yours?"

He nodded nervously. "Yes, sir. Because I'd like the fifty thousand dollars."

"What fifty thousand dollars?"

"The fifty thousand you promised me for not going to the police, sir."

I glared incredulously. "Why should I promise you fifty thousand dollars not to go to the police?"

He swallowed. "Don't you remember, sir? Last night you murdered your wife."

I stared at him.

He seemed to gain confidence. "You and your wife had a quarrel last night, sir. About ten-thirty, it was. I don't know what you were arguing about, but just as I en-

tered the room with a tray of sandwiches, you picked up a poker and struck her over the head. You killed her instantly, sir."

I found that I had to sit down.

Francis went on. "We put her body in the station wagon and drove into the country, sir. We buried her in a grove of trees. I'm positive no one will ever find her."

I think I absorbed all this fairly well. Was the death of my wife the reason I had amnesia? And yet, now that I had been told that I had killed her, why didn't my memory return? Was it because I didn't want to know *why* I had committed the murder?

"The fifty thousand dollars, sir," Francis said again.

"You won't get a cent."

Color crept to his cheekbones. "Then I will be forced to let the police know."

"Have you ever considered the fact that you are an accessory?"

He smiled slyly. "I will not go to the police, personally. I will merely send them an anonymous note telling them where to find the body of your wife. If you attempt to implicate me, I will deny everything. It will be your word against mine and I think you have much more to lose than I."

If only I could *remember* where we had buried Beverly, I could re-

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move her body and bury it some place else. But obviously Francis wasn't going to tell me now.

It was apparent that I would have to meet his demand, but there was an obstacle to overcome before I could do that. "I can't give you the fifty thousand dollars now. Darwin has seen to it that I can't touch a cent of my money until I've recovered my memory."

He must have thought I was lying. "I'm going to send the note to the police," he said stubbornly.

"Francis, you've been with me ten years, haven't you?"

He nodded warily, perhaps wondering whether I was about to appeal to his sympathy.

"Then as a man's man, I assume that you know just as much about me and my acquaintances as I do—did?"

"Perhaps."

"Very well. Then we're going to sit down and you're going to tell me everything you know about me—about my friends, my enemies, about my interests, my activities."

He still didn't understand why.

"Don't you see," I said impatiently. "We're going to make it *appear* that I've recovered my memory. When we've done that, I'll be able to draw out the fifty thousand dollars and hand it over to you."

His eyes brightened momentarily and then became uncertain again.

I thought I knew what was in his mind. Suppose I actually *did* recover my memory and did so without telling him. I could secretly disinter Beverly's body and bury it some place else. That would leave him with little or no actual hold over me.

"Francis," I said, and tried to make the words reassuring, "the doctor at police headquarters informed me privately that my specific type of amnesia is cured only by time. And he estimated that this time would be almost a year. We're just going to make it *seem* as though I had recovered my memory. And we ought to be able to do that within a week or two."

My lies cheered him considerably.

He would not have been so sanguine had he known what was inevitably in store for him. Obviously, I could not allow him to blackmail me forever—and that is the habit of blackmailers. I would have to get rid of him permanently and I would have to do the job myself. I would have done it at this moment perhaps, but I did need him to regain control of my estate.

Francis and I set about our task systematically. We collected all the

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photographs in the house. Finding any of my wife proved difficult, but eventually I discovered several in the drawer of her vanity table.

She was exquisite—even in the candid snapshots. Beautiful—and yet, remote. Cool.

Francis and I went through our pile of snapshots and he identified the various individuals and gave me whatever information he possessed about them. Nothing, however, brought back any authentic recollection. I learned many facts concerning myself and my life through study and rote.

Darwin and Violet dropped in every day. And when they inquired about my wife, I fabricated the story that she had decided on a sudden visit to a dear friend in California. After a few weeks, I would go to the police and report her missing, but I did not want them delving about at the present time.

After slightly more than a week with Francis, I felt qualified to surprise Darwin with the bald statement that I had completely recovered my memory.

Darwin had done such a thorough job of protecting my money from me, that I found it obligatory to appear before a court-appointed committee of doctors and endure some one hundred and thirty ques-

tions Darwin had compiled, to insure that I was truly familiar with my past.

There were, naturally, some questions which Francis and I had not foreseen, but an allowance was made for a normal decline of memory through the passage of years.

After the interview, three more days dragged by before the legal tangle was removed and I was once again reunited with my money.

When Darwin phoned me the happy news, I immediately gave all the servants—with the exception of Francis—the afternoon and evening off. When they were gone, I rang for Francis.

"Well, Francis, how would you like your money? Cash, I suppose?"

His eyes glittered with anticipation. "Cash, sir. And small bills, if you please."

I nodded. "Very well. I'll drive to the bank in a few moments."

I went to the sideboard and kept the glass I intended for Francis blocked by my back. It already contained the white powder. I added whiskey and sweet soda to cover any possible bitterness and brought back his glass and mine. "We'll have a drink on our success."

"I don't drink, sir."

"Nonsense. My estate has been

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returned to me and you are about to possess fifty thousand dollars. Surely that's worth a drink of celebration. And sit down, man."

I was not concerned with his comfort, but I did prefer that he should be sitting when he felt the effects of the drink.

He took his glass and enjoyed the pleasure of sitting down in the presence of his employer. I prompted conversation for approximately ten minutes before he began to nod.

It was another ten minutes before Francis was quite dead.

After some difficulty, I succeeded in hefting Francis over one shoulder and carrying him along the concealing line of trees to the garage. I deposited him in the bed of the station wagon and covered his body with a tarpaulin.

I added a shovel and a pick to the load and then removed my outer clothing and slipped into a pair of greasy coveralls I found on a wall peg.

Francis and I had evidently buried Beverly in the night, and apparently one of us had held the flashlight while the other dug. But I was alone now and it seemed much more practical to dig the grave for Francis during the daylight. I was quite certain that after an hour or two of driving, I would find some place sufficiently untraveled for me to park the car

and select a suitable burial site.

I drove down Capitol to Sixth and turned north on Highway 42. The traffic was mild and I passed through several small near-city towns before I began considering a turn into one of the graveled side roads.

However, none of them appeared to lead to sufficient isolation and I continued on to Medlow.

At the right turn just outside of that village, the traffic in front of me came to a halt and I was forced to stop.

I craned my head out of the window. Six or seven cars were halted in front of me and a state patrol car was parked on the shoulder of the road.

I experienced a momentary panic, until I realized that this was merely a routine highway safety check. The officer would simply ascertain that my horn, my headlights, and my tail lights were in working order and affix an inspection sticker on my windshield. I would be on my way in a few minutes.

I glanced at the rear of the station wagon. The stiffness of the tarpaulin concealed any suspicious outlines and Francis was thoroughly covered.

I relaxed and gradually edged my car forward until it was my turn for the inspection.

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The officer found my lights and horn satisfactory and he came back to the driver's window. "Your driver's license, please."

My driver's license! But that had been in the wallet I'd thrown over the bridge!

I made a pretense of going through my pockets and then smiled weakly as I said, "I'm afraid I left my wallet home, officer."

He regarded me for a moment and then went to the front of my car. He returned immediately. "You wouldn't happen to remember your license number, would you?"

My smile was still apologetic. "I really don't have a head for numbers."

And he smiled, too, but it was a thin smile. "Your license number happens to be AA 100. I kind of think you'd remember it—if this is your car."

He looked the shining exterior of the station wagon over once more and then his eyes returned to me. "What do you do for a living?"

"I have an independent income."

He chuckled softly and I knew he was thinking of the grimy coveralls I wore.

"Look, officer," I said. "If you'll just phone—" I suddenly realized that I didn't remember Darwin's

first name. "If you'll just phone my investment counselor," I continued swiftly, "he'll be able to identify me. We've known each other for twenty years. His name is Darwin."

Perhaps the officer was impressed by the term "investment counselor." A common auto thief is hardly likely to cite one of them as a reference.

He gave my suggestion a moment's thought and then said, "All right, we might give it a try. What's this Darwin's number?"

And I didn't know!

Francis and I had spent a week of hard work together, but there are so many details one can overlook—so many inconsequential little things that suddenly become important—a license number, a first name, a phone number.

I found myself perspiring. "I don't recall the number but surely you can look it up."

The officer's eyes narrowed. "You've known him for twenty years, but you don't know his phone number?" He opened the car door. "That was a nice bluff, mister, but now move over. I'll do the driving."

The three men in the room with me were detectives and the large one who said he was Newell be-

gan the interminable questioning:
"Why did you kill him?"

"I have nothing to say until I see my lawyer. Get me Darwin."

"We let you look up his number and phone his office. There was no answer."

"It's after five. He's probably home."

"But you don't know his home phone number, or his address, or even his first name. And there are twenty-six Darwins in the city directory and another dozen scattered in the suburbs."

"Well, try them all," I snapped.

Newell sighed and nodded to one of the other detectives. He left the room.

Newell lit a cigarette. "You do admit that you can identify the body in your station wagon?"

There was no point in denying that. "Yes. He was my valet."

"What's his last name?"

"I don't *know* his last name. I never addressed him as anything but Francis." How could Francis and I have overlooked anything so elementary?

Newell puffed at his cigarette. "Could you tell us why we found a letter and envelope addressed to you in one of this Francis' pockets?"

"What letter?"

He took an envelope out of his pocket, laid it down on the desk.

I stared at it and then I began to tremble.

I had *not* killed my wife.

I remembered. Everything. Everything.

She was alive and soon would be with that miserable . . .

I didn't have to pick up the letter. Every word was a remembered stab.

Dear Oswald:

I married you for your money and you married me because I was something nice to own. When we arrived at our tacit agreement, I could foresee no possibility that I should ever have to break it.

I have always regarded myself as somewhat cold-blooded. Perhaps I even took pride in this. But having money alone did not prove enough. I am a woman and I discovered, somewhat to my surprise —that I needed affection. Love.

Do you remember Roger Ferris? I believe you and he belong to several of the same clubs.

He does not have the wealth you do, Oswald, but I'm sure we will find it comfortably sufficient.

I am establishing residence outside of the state and of course there will be no question of a property settlement. I simply want my freedom.

I have told no one, except Roger, about this, and I leave it to you to explain matters to your friends.

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You may devise anything you wish. I will not deny it.

Beverly

Roger Ferris! That vapid . . .

I had read that letter at home and then had raged through the house snatching every photograph, every portrait, of Beverly. And I had cursed and watched them burn in the fireplace.

Roger Ferris!

What could I tell my friends?

At the club. . . .

They would remember that I had played cards with Ferris often. And suspected nothing.

They would whisper . . . whisper. They would point after I passed by.

They would *laugh!*

I could *not* be laughed at.

And now I remembered that I had left the house and walked until I reached the bridge. The water below had been cold and harsh. It repelled—and it invited. I had closed my eyes. *What* could I do?

And then the policeman had tapped me on the shoulder and I had opened my eyes to a world of

strangers. I wanted to know none of them and none of them must know me.

And now Francis!

He had found and read that letter and that vile creature had used my amnesia to blackmail me for something I had *not* done.

It was too much. Too much. To be made a fool of by a wife . . . and by a *servant!*

I closed my eyes and when a door clicked, I opened them again, feeling apprehensive.

There were three men in the room and one of them said, "I phoned about a dozen Darwins and I think I've got the right one now. He'll be here in a few minutes."

Darwin? Who was this Darwin? And what was I doing in this room?

I looked at the three men—the three men I had never seen before this very instant—and I was sure of only one thing. I wasn't going to believe anything they said.

Nothing at all.

I wasn't. I wasn't.

